

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T ALGIERS 0460

EXDIS

DEPT PLEASE PASS CINCEUR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SS, AG, MO, MR, SP

SUBJECT: SPANISH SAHARA: MULTILATERAL MISCALCULATION AS A
RULE OF POLITICS

1. AS PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE REMARKED TO VISITING ASTRONAUTS
ON FEB. 27, THERE IS NO EXACT SCIENCE OF POLITICAL BALLISTICS.
EACH INITIATIVE HAS MULTIPLE TRAJECTORIES, AND NO ONE KNOWS
WHERE IT WILL LAND. SPANISH SAHARA IMBROGLIO IS A CLASSIC
EXAMPLE OF SERIOUSLY MISCALCULATED TRAJECTORIES.

2. HASSAN, THE PRIME MOVER, HAS MADE A NUMBER OF
MISCALCULATIONS REGARDING ATTITUDES OF SAHARANS AND ALGERIANS.
TO BEGIN WITH, HE MISCALCULATED SAHARAN DESIRES AND WAS
ACTIVELY PROMOTING SELF-DETERMINATION UNTIL 1973, BY WHICH
TIME HE WAS PRISONER OF HIS OWN RHETORIC AND HAD TO MAKE
SUBSEQUENT COMMITMENTS AND STATEMENTS WHICH WERE INCONSISTENT
WITH THE POLICY HE EVENTUALLY FOLLOWED WHEN TIME CAME TO
BE DECISIVE, THIS HAS GIVEN ALGERIANS USEFUL STICK WITH
WHICH TO BELABOR HIM. MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE UNDERESTIMATED

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STRENGTH OF SAHARAN OPOSITION TO MOROCCAN RULE AND APPARENTLY

MISCALCULATED STRENGTH OF ALGERIAN READINESS TO SUPPORT POLISARIO. LATTER SEEMS FURTHERMORE TO HAVE TURNED INTO CONSIDERABLY MORE EFFECTIVE FIGHTING FORCE THAN MOROCCANS EXPECTED. CURRENT OUTLOOK IS FOR PROLONGED AND BITTER GUERRILLA WAR, AND POLISARIO MAY WELL SUCCEED IN MAKING SAHARA OR PORTIONS OF IT UNTENABLE FOR MOROCCAN CIVILIANS . IF SO, MOROCCANS LIKELY BE GOADED INTO ATTACKING POLISARIO'S PRIVILEGED SANCTUARIES IN ALGERIA, AND ESCALATION OF CONFLICT INTO ALGERIAN-MOROCCAN WAR WILL ENSUE.

3. IN DEFENSE OF HASSAN'S SKILL AS CALCULATOR, IT SEEMS EVIDENT HE WAS MISLED BY ALGERIANS ON AT LEAST ONE OCCASION, I.E., BOUTEFLIKA VISIT TO RABAT IN JULY 1975, WHEN MOROCCANS THOUGHT THEY HAD REACHED AGREEMENT ON PARTITION OF TERRITORY IN EXCHANGE FOR RATIFICATION BORDER ACCORD WITH ALGERIA. ON OTHER HAND, LACK OF MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR HERE HAS MEANT HASSAN HAS BEEN ILL-INFORMED AS TO ALGERIAN POSITION, AND HE HAS NO ONE BUT HIMSELF TO BLAME FOR THAT.

4. BOUMEDIENE FOR HIS PART SERIOUSLY MISCALCULATED THIRD WORLD AND ARAB SUPPORT FOR HIS POSITION. AMONG ALL HIS ARAB BROTHERS, FOR INSTANCE, HE CAN COUNT ON SUPPORT FROM LIBYA AND SOUTH YEMEN, NEITHER A VERY RELIABLE ALLY. AFRICANS ARE DIVIDED ON THE ISSUE. NORTH KOREA AND CUBA SUPPORT ALGERIA, BUT CHINA DOES NOT. SOVIETS SUPPORT ALGERIA, WITH SOME RESERVATIONS, BUT MOST OTHER COMMUNIST COUNTRIES ARE TRYING TO MAINTAIN SOMETHING LIKE NEUTRALITY. MOST WESTERN COUNTRY SYMPATHIES LIE WITH MOROCCO.

5. BOUMEDIENE ALSO MISCALCULATED SPANISH CONSTANCY IN FACE OF MOROCCAN PRESSURES AT TIME OF DOMESTIC CRISIS, AND HE MISCALCULATED MOROCCAN DETERMINATION AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR HASSAN.

6. SPAIN APPEARS TO HAVE MISCALCULATED:
(A) ALGERIAN COMMITMENT TO SELF-DETERMINATION,
(B) WISHES OF THE SAHARAN POPULATION AND (C) EXTREMES TO WHICH HASSAN WAS PREPARED TO GO TO ATTAIN HIS ENDS.

7. TUNISIANS AND MAURITANIANS BOTH MISCALCULATED INTENSITY
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OF BOUMEDIENE'S FEELINGS AND COMMITMENT. THUS, NONE OF PARTIES IN MAGHREB SEEMS TO HAVE FORESEEN WHAT HE WAS GETTING INTO.

8. PRESENT SITUATION IS IN NO ONE'S INTEREST, EXCEPT POSSIBLY SOVIETS, WHO MAY BE ABLE TO PROFIT FROM THEIR ARMS SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH ALGERIANS TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES MORE FIRMLY HERE. QUESTION FOR US IS WHETHER THERE IS WAY OUT

OF IMPASSE. IN THEORY, ALGERIA COULD THROW IN TOWEL AND SOLVE IT ALL. THIS WOULD MEAN ABANDONMENT OF PRINCIPLES AND OF PUBLIC POSITIONS, WHICH WOULD BE EXTREMELY EMBARRASSING. MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT WOULD MEAN ADMISSION OF DEFEAT BY HASSAN, A HUMILIATING AND POTENTIALLLY FATAL STEP FOR BOUMEDIENE. IF THERE IS TO BE PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, HOWEVER, HE MUST ACCEPT SOMETHING LESS THAN HIS GOVERNMENT'S PUBLIC DEMAND FOR TOTAL SELF-DETERMINATION. WE BELIEVE HE REALIZES THIS AND THAT HE WOULD ACCEPT FACE-SAVING COMPROMISE IF IT CONTAINED ELEMENT OF SELF-DETERMINATION.

9. REVERSE OF THIS PROPOSITION, HOWEVER, IS THAT RABAT MUST AGREE TO MODIFY ITS POSITION THAT THE SAHARA CASE IS CLOSED, THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SAHARAN PEOPLE, AND THAT THERE IS NOTHING TO DISCUSS. IF THERE IS TO BE PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, MOROCCANS WILL HAVE TO AGREE TO AT LEAST PARTIAL SELF-DETERMINATION, INCLUDING PERHAPS (A) CONSULTATION WITH A RECONSTITUTED JEMAA, (B) A DEAL WITH POLISARIO, AND (C) SOME SORT OF SPECIAL REGIME FOR THE SAHARA WHICH WILL NOT DEROGATE SERIOUSLY FROM MOROCCAN SOVEREIGNTY. (THERE SOME PRECEDENT FOR LATTER IN SPECIAL CUSTOMS STATUS ENJOYED BY TAN TAN.) IF THE KING'S MINISTERS ARE TO BE BELIEVED, THIS APPROACH IS ANATHEMA, BUT SOMETHING LIKE IT WILL BE A SINE QUA NON OF SETTLEMENT.

10. IN SAYING THE ABOVE, AM WELL AWARE OF FIRMNESS OF CURRENT MOROCCAN POSITION. ALTERNATIVE, HOWEVER, IS LONG AND COSTLY STRUGGLE WHICH WILL UNDERMINE STABILITY OF THIS REGION AND WILL EFFECT INTERESTS OF WORLD COMMUNITY AS WELL AS THOSE OF COUNTRIES DIRECTLY CONCERNED. ONE OF CASUALTIES, OF COURSE, WILL BE U.S.-ALGERIAN RELATIONS, SUCH AS THEY ARE.

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11. AM WELL AWARE OF LIMITATIONS OF OUR INFLUENCES ON HASSAN. WE SHOULD, HOWEVER, AT LEAST MAKE IT CLEAR TO HIM THAT WE HAVE IMPORTANT INTERESTS AT STAKE IN ALGERIA AND THAT HE CANNOT COUNT ON OUR UNLIMITED SUPPORT IF SITUATION DETERIORATES. AS SEEN FROM HERE, HASSAN'S HARD-NOSED APPROACH IS PREDICATED ON ASSUMPTION WE (AND OTHER, NOTABLY FRENCH) WILL BACK HIM UP ALL THE WAY. IF HE WERE TO BEGIN TO DOUBT THIS, HE MIGHT BE CONVINCED TO SHOW A LITTLE MORE FLEXIBILITY. HE MIGHT ALSO BECOME LESS COOPERATIVE ABOUT BASE ARRANGEMENTS AND FLEET VISITS, BUT PAST HAS SHOWN HE NEEDS OUR PRESENCE THERE AND WE NOT WITHOUT CARDS TO PLAY.
PARKER

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